

PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS MESSAGING SCRIPT

PURPOSE

The core messages below were drafted for use in conversation/correspondence with contacts in key recruitment markets – both with host country officials and higher education stakeholders. The latest iteration of this script provides:

- Updates to core lines that were no longer in line with UK government policy; and
- An update on the public health position and associated sector response.

The UK Government's (HMG) and the Devolved Administrations' (DAs) – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – position is that, despite the disruption created by COVID-19, the UK continues to be overwhelmingly in favour of international students joining UK universities, and we are working to ensure the UK is a welcoming and safe place to live and study. We would like to encourage international students to consider the UK as a place to study for the current academic year (AY 2020/21) and beyond.

These lines have been prepared and circulated to ensure that messages from HMG and DA representatives to international students in priority recruitment markets are consistent.

AUDIENCE

These messages are designed to reach international students themselves, as well as their key 'influencers' (parents, guardians, agents, counsellors, schools etc).

HEADLINES/NEW POLICY

[CORRECT AS AT TIME OF PUBLICATION ON 05/02/2021]

Returning to university during lockdown

England

- In England, we are [prioritising the return to face-to-face teaching](#) for courses which need to be delivered in-person.
- Students **not** studying on one of these courses (listed in [the latest guidance for higher education providers](#)) should stay where they are and access course content online.
- If a student has already booked travel outside of their university's stated return to campus date, they should consider delaying their journey if travel arrangements cannot be rearranged without undue cost.

Scotland:

- In Scotland, any university education that can be done online must be done online and the majority of colleges will be taught online in January and into February.
- Students who are currently overseas should not travel to Scotland until face-to-face teaching begins for them. When returning, they must follow the [guidance on international](#) travel including quarantining if they are from a non-exempt country.

Wales:

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- The Minister for Education has asked universities to prioritise the return to in-person learning for those who cannot complete their study from home. This means if you can study (work) from home you should. If you can't study from home then you can attend in-person learning in the same way as others need to attend their place of work.
- Universities will inform students when their course of study will resume in-person. Institutions have agreed to only ask those for whom it is essential to attend in person learning to return before mid-February. Universities inform us health related subjects, those on placements, students who require access to laboratory, studio or other on campus facilities, final year students with qualification requirements and post-graduate study have been prioritised. These are similar to the regulated list in England and Scotland.
- There is more information available for students in Wales in [FAQs](#).

Northern Ireland

- In Northern Ireland, guidance has been produced for the return of students and includes [information for international students](#).
- There is also guidance for all students [available](#).

Pre-departure testing is required for students arriving in the UK from overseas

- The UK has robust arrivals procedures in place and is following scientific advice from SAGE. This may mean advice needs to change as the public health situation changes, to manage/reduce transmission rates and keep those here safe.
- Globally we're seeing increasing levels of coronavirus and new strains, which is why we're taking swift action at UK borders.
- Effective from 04:00 AM, Monday 18 January 2021, all inbound travellers to the UK will have to take a test up to 3 days before departure and provide evidence of a negative result before they travel. More information on the pre-departure testing requirements is available here:
 - England: www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-people-travelling-to-england
 - Scotland: <http://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-public-health-checks-at-borders/>
 - Wales: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-people-travelling-wales>
 - Northern Ireland: www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/pre-departure-testing-all-international-arrivals-northern-ireland

Travel into the UK

- New and returning students from overseas **must**:
 - check additional entry requirements and restrictions that have been introduced due to COVID-19 before travelling to the UK
 - provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test result taken within 3 days of departure to their transport operator. More information on pre-departure testing is available [on gov.uk](#).
 - complete a passenger locator form before arrival in the UK
 - **note that all UK travel corridors temporarily suspended to protect**

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against new international variants, this new measure will now require all passengers to self-isolate for ten days on arrival.

- If self-isolating, students should:
 - only use public transport if they have no other option
 - follow safer travel guidance for passengers
 - only leave their accommodation in limited circumstances and follow guidance on how to self-isolate when they travel to the UK (England only)
- In England, international arrivals have the option to reduce their self-isolation period by taking a coronavirus (COVID-19) test from a private testing provider five full days after arriving in England, with a negative result releasing them from the need to self-isolate. Read the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Test to Release for international travel](#) guidance. Look at [a list of providers for Test to Release](#).
- The Test to Release scheme is not available to anyone who has been in or through any country that is subject to a travel ban in the 10 days before arrival in England.
- In England, students who have chosen to self-isolate for the full 10 days instead of doing Test to Release do not need to take a further LFD test at the end of their self-isolation period. After following the correct arrivals procedure, students should follow instructions on ongoing asymptomatic testing as set out by their HE provider.

Hotel quarantine policy for England, Wales and Northern Ireland

- The Government announced that from the 15 February all arrivals from those countries currently subject to a ban on entry into the UK who cannot be refused entry (British and Irish Nationals, or third country nationals with residence rights in the UK) will be required to isolate in government-provided accommodation - such as hotels - for ten days without exception. They will be met at the airport and transported directly into quarantine. The costs of isolating in a hotel will be borne by the traveller.
- We are working as quickly as possible across Government and will be reaching out to industry to bring these new measures into place quickly. More information on this will be set out in due course, including on type of accommodation and further detail on cost etc.

Travel to another country from the UK

- On the 27 January, the government has announced further action for outbound passengers to minimise travel across international borders and reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.
- For those wishing to travel out of the UK, the measures announced include:

Declaring reason for travel: Everyone travelling from England will need to declare the purpose of their travel and it will be an offence to make a false declaration. The 'reason for travel' form will be checked by

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carriers prior to departure.

Increased police enforcement: There will be an increased police presence at ports and airports, fining those in breach of the stay at home regulations. Anyone without valid reason for travel will be directed to return home and may face a fine.

Reviewing travel exemptions: The list of travel exemptions will be urgently reviewed so that only the most important and exceptional reasons are included.

- As has always been the case under the national lockdown, Foreign nationals resident in England, including international students, are subject to the 'Stay at Home' regulations. International students should therefore remain at their term time accommodation, and should not leave it to travel abroad or within the UK, for either short term trips or holidays, unless they are leaving home to travel for a legally permitted reason.
- Such reasons would include moving home permanently or if they have a medical need to do so – which would include for mental health reasons.
- We are working as quickly as possible across Government and will be reaching out to industry to bring these new measures into place quickly. **We will set out details including when these measures go live.**
- Students should be aware that travel advice may change while they are overseas and are advised to regularly check all relevant GOV.UK guidance pages for updates.
- In Scotland, the restrictions in legislation make it clear that people should only leave the place where they are currently living for an essential purpose. Travel outside a person's local authority area is also only permitted if there is a reasonable excuse for doing so. Students should be aware that travel advice may change while they are overseas, and are advised to regularly check information on country exemptions for updates.

Message 1: We are putting the health of students and staff at the heart of our decisions whilst making sure high-quality teaching continues online

- **England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are currently subject to strong lockdown measures in order to contain the spread of the virus and keep people safe.** This is a fast-moving global pandemic, and the UK is working to protect and prioritise the health of students and the broader population. Students should be mindful that lockdown rules may vary between UK nations, and should ensure they adhere to the rules that relate to the country in which they are studying and/or plan to study.
- Universities across the UK are ready to support students. Governments across the UK **have issued extensive guidance ([England](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#)) to the higher education sector on how to operate safely, and universities have implemented significant changes to ensure accommodation and campus facilities are COVID-secure.**
- Where face-to-face teaching is happening, COVID-19 safety measures are in place. These include increased cleaning, ventilation, handwashing facilities, social distancing, advice on rules of contact and social mixing with additional messaging promoting COVID-secure behaviour to students. For those students who are asked to complete a period of self-isolation while at university, their respective providers are responsible for ensuring their students are safe and well looked after during their self-isolation period.

Message 2: UK universities continue to deliver a high-quality academic experience. Our world-leading institutions have worked to ensure their courses help students achieve their academic goals, regardless of the mode of delivery

- UK higher education providers are globally recognised, with 4 providers in the top 10, and 18 providers in the top 100. They also have a stellar reputation for world-class research.
- UK higher education degrees and qualifications, as well as the research conducted by our world-class universities, are recognised by employers and academics worldwide, and produce top graduates.
- **Providers are well-prepared** to offer online provision and have worked so that online provision is high-quality and well-adapted for all students. **We have seen some excellent and innovative examples of high-quality online learning being delivered by universities across the UK.** For example, some universities have created virtual ward rounds with virtual patients to mimic clinical decision making for their medical students, while others have developed new ways for students to conduct field work, including the use of hi-res photographs, Google Earth and drone-scans.
- In a [statement](#), England's higher education regulator – the Office for Students (OfS) – has reiterated to students its commitment to quality learning, including learning delivered online. The OfS continues to actively monitor the situation and is actively engaging with a number of universities to ensure that they are delivering good quality teaching for all students, regardless of the mode.
- The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, as the regulator for higher education in Wales, has published a [circular](#) which reaffirms its expectations

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that providers will continue to meet their obligations for quality and standards.

Message 3: The UK has been flexible in its immigration response to COVID-19 and has a highly competitive offer for international HE students looking to study at our universities

- **The UK was one of the first countries to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by introducing comprehensive immigration flexibility.** Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the UK Government has implemented a number of concessions to assist visa holders in the UK who have been impacted by global travel and health restrictions. This has included offering extensions of visas, relaxing the rules on switching in the UK, and enabling international students to continue existing courses or commence new courses of study by distance/blended learning for the duration of the 2020-21 academic year.
- **The UK Government is very clear that no one will have a negative outcome through the immigration system due to a circumstance that is beyond their control.** To assist this, we have introduced a number of active concessions for students in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Government can confirm that individuals whose leave expires between 1 December 2020 and 28 February 2021, who intend to leave the UK but are not able to do so before their leave expires, may request additional time to stay known as 'exceptional assurance'. If granted, this will act as a short-term protection against any adverse action or consequences after leave has expired.
- Individuals issued with 'exceptional assurance' are also able to apply for leave to remain to regularise their stay, even where they would usually need to apply from their home country; applications must be submitted before the expiry of their 'exceptional assurance'. Government will continue to keep these concessions under review.
- If international students have immigration queries related to COVID-19 they should email the Government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Immigration Help Centre at CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk.

The Graduate Route

- **From summer 2021, international students completing undergraduate or master's degrees will be able to benefit from two years' work experience (three years for PhD graduates) in the UK upon successful completion of their course via the new Graduate immigration route.**
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Government has confirmed that:
 - Existing international students who have been studying by distance/blended learning and who are due to complete their degree in summer 2021 will remain eligible to apply for the Graduate route provided they are in the UK by 6 April 2021 to complete the final semester of their studies in the UK and meet the other requirements of the route; however, students should check additional entry requirements and restrictions that have been introduced due to COVID-19 before travelling to the UK and only travel to their university when their provider has confirmed the resumption of face-to-face teaching for their specific course. Students should be aware that rules may differ depending on which UK nation they are studying in, so are

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advised to consult relevant COVID-19 guidance that applies to them. Students studying in England should see [Higher education providers: coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), and

- Students who commence a one-year Master's programme in January 2021 will also remain eligible for the Graduate route even if they are studying remotely, provided they enter the UK before 27 September 2021 and complete the final semester of their studies in the UK.

The Student Route

- **The UK's new and improved Student route, which falls under the UK's points-based immigration system, is open for applications.** The Student route improves on the previous Tier 4 visa route making for a more streamlined experience for international students. The period in which a student outside of the UK can apply for leave, prior to the commencement of their course, has been extended from three months to six months; this change enables students to apply earlier and provide certainty of their immigration status prior to commencing their course.
- The Student Route coupled with the Graduate Route – our globally competitive post-study work offer – means we now have a world-class student visa offer befitting our world-class higher education sector.

Message 4: International students will be supported in the UK – our universities care about student their health, safety and wellbeing

Self-isolation

- **Universities in the UK are working so that international students are well looked after during COVID crisis.** The Government recognises that international students may have specific support needs whilst studying in the UK, particularly if self-isolating.
- **Government and providers have worked together to support students in accessing food, medical and cleaning supplies.** They have also ensured students have ongoing access to first points of contact for COVID-19 queries and concerns, and have made proactive wellbeing support available (including student support networks, mental health and academic support) where required.
- Universities UK has published a [commitment to student wellbeing and education](#), and universities Scotland has published a '[consistent core of care](#)' for students during the pandemic. They have also published a [new checklist](#) to guide universities that are supporting students who are self-isolating. This builds on [previous guidance](#) which they published to reaffirm and clarify the actions universities should consider to best support students' physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.
- **Universities have been asked to ensure that self-isolating students have a range of choices available for access to food and other essential supplies.** This includes providing food to those that need it and facilitating deliveries that will not require students to leave the accommodation where they are self-isolating.

Specific student support

- **We encourage students to stay in touch with their provider's student support and welfare teams, wherever they are learning, as these services are likely to continue to be an important source of support.** Many providers have bolstered their existing mental health services, and adapted delivery mechanisms including reaching out to students who may be more vulnerable.
- **In specific cases, immediate hardship funding can also be made available by universities for students in need – students should speak to their providers if they find themselves in need of hardship support.** In total we have made £70m of funding available for student hardship. Support might include help for students, including international students and postgraduates, facing additional costs arising from having to maintain accommodation in more than one location or assistance to help students access teaching remotely.
- The Welsh Government is [providing an additional £40m](#) for universities to support students facing financial hardship, helping the students most affected by the pandemic with expenses such as accommodation costs. The funding is in addition to over £40 million the Welsh Government has already provided to help universities this financial year, which has included £10m towards student hardship, mental health support and student unions.
- Students experiencing hardship as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19) will be supported by additional £20 million of Scottish Government funding. A further £10 million has also been allocated to universities and colleges for lost income in providing rent rebates.
- To complement the additional £30 million, the Scottish Funding Council is also repurposing £5 million of student support funding towards discretionary funding for Further Education students in the college sector. Further information is available at: [Support for students in hardship - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Mental health and wellbeing

- **Universities have been adapting by creating blended programmes of events and activities to ensure students are welcomed and to help ensure safe social interaction.** These will be conducted in accordance with the relevant national and local guidance for each country in the UK, with changes made to the operation of live events and venues to comply with social distancing guidance.
- **Many universities are running international buddy schemes that are available to all new and returning self-isolating students.** To support international students through self-isolation these international buddies provide proactive and dedicated support, and include contacting students by video calls, delivering care packs, and sharing top tips on university life.
- Working collaboratively, the Department for Education in England and the Welsh Government, have allocated additional funding through the OfS and HEFCW to provide Student Space. Student Space is a mental health and

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wellbeing platform designed to bridge any gaps in support for students arising from this unprecedented situation and works alongside existing services.

- Over £9 million has been provided by the government in England to leading mental health charities to help them expand and reach those most in need. Students struggling with their mental health can also access support via online resources from the NHS, Public Health England via the [Better Health - Every Mind Matters](#) website, and the mental health charity Mind.
- In Scotland, the Scottish Government are investing a further £3.65 million, on top of a similar investment last year, to support of the commitment to provide more than 80 additional counsellors in every college and university in Scotland over the next four years.
- In Wales, the Welsh Government is providing an extra £10 million this year towards [supporting university students during the pandemic](#). The funding will support activities such as increased mental health services and student financial hardship funds. It will also help universities bolster their student support services, including food services for students who are required to self-isolate.
- **We encourage students to stay in touch with their provider's student support and welfare teams, wherever they are learning, as these services are likely to continue to be an important source of support.** Many providers have bolstered their existing mental health services, and adapted delivery mechanisms including reaching out to students who may be more vulnerable.

Health services available to international students

NHS services

- Our amazing National Health Service (NHS) has taken care of people from around the world during this global pandemic and will continue to do so. In addition to support from their universities, NHS services are available to both domestic and international students.
- No charges apply to testing for COVID-19, even if the result is negative, or to any treatment provided in relation to COVID-19 if the result is positive or up to the point that it is negatively diagnosed.
- The NHS can also provide international students with specific COVID-19 advice through a new COVID-19 online service www.111.nhs.uk/covid-19 or by calling 111. International students will always be able to access treatment that clinicians consider is immediately necessary or urgent at no upfront cost.

COVID-19 testing

- After following the correct arrivals procedure, students should follow instructions on ongoing asymptomatic testing as set out by their HE provider.
- The ambition is to work with all higher education (HE) providers to continue to build testing provision at their institutions, including the use of lateral flow devices (LFDs). All HE providers are being urged to offer asymptomatic testing to all eligible students on their return to university, and twice weekly thereafter, until the end of March.

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- In Wales, students will be expected to book an asymptomatic test on return to campus and each university will be able to let you know how to do that.

COVID-19 vaccination

- **The UK was the first country in the world to start a vaccination programme using the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. The UK was also the first country in the world to procure and authorise the Oxford vaccine,** and we were the first country in the world to start a vaccination programme with it. The pathway to recovery is clear, and vaccine rollout is happening across the country, prioritised according to clinical need.
- **International students who live in the UK and are registered with a General Practitioner (GP) will be able to access the Covid-19 vaccine,** just as they are currently able to access healthcare. This means that older international students or those with underlying medical conditions will fall into priority categories, in the same way as the domestic population. Individuals will be contacted by their GP to book their vaccine via an online or telephone system – there is no need for students to proactively contact their GP about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Anyone who lives in the UK is entitled to receive NHS Primary Care medical services at a general practice (GPs) surgery for free. **When you arrive in the UK you should register with a local GP surgery as soon as possible.** There may be a GP surgery attached to your university. GPs are trained and experienced in diagnosing and treating a range of health problems.

ANNEX A: USEFUL RESOURCES

Visas and Immigration

- **Home Office COVID-19 guidance for international students:** www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-tier-4-sponsors-migrants-and-short-term-students
- **Home Office COVID-19 advice for UK visa applicants:**
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents>
- **Student visa application:** www.gov.uk/student-visa
- **Graduate immigration route Q&A:** www.gov.uk/government/news/government-fires-up-rd-across-the-country-to-cement-the-uk-as-science-superpower

Teaching

- **Office for Students on quality and standards:** www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-about-quality-and-standards-during-coronavirus-pandemic/
- **HEFCW Higher Education Funding Council for Wales on quality and standards:** www.hefcw.ac.uk/working_with_he_providers/coronavirus/coronavirus.aspx
- **Scottish Funding Council quality standards in Scottish Universities:** www.sfc.ac.uk/quality/quality-universities/quality-universities.aspx
- **Higher education quality assurance | Department for the Economy (economy-ni.gov.uk):** www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/higher-education-quality-assurance

COVID-19 Guidance

- **Scientific advice and guidance:** www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-scientific-evidence-supporting-the-uk-government-response
- **Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy:** www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy
- **General COVID-19 guidance:** www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance
- Information on face coverings can be found online here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own

Students coming to study in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should check the following links for the latest COVID-19 guidance:

Scotland:

- www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/
- www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-can-and-cannot-do/pages/students/
- www.studentinformation.gov.scot

Wales:

- www.gov.wales/coronavirus
- <https://gov.wales/advice-coronavirus-technical-advisory-cell>
- Wales' response to coronavirus <https://gov.wales/wales-response-coronavirus>

Northern Ireland:

- www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-overview-and-advice